

Jack Roedel #28  
December 7th, 1984

Q: Mr. Roedel, when did you first join the Army?

A: March 9th, 1940.

Q: Were you drafted or did you enlist?

A: I enlisted.

Q: Where did you go to boot camp?

A: I signed up for overseas service so I took my basic training at Schofield Barracks.

Q: How did you get to Hawaii?

A: Aboard the United States Army Transport *Leonard Wood*.

Q: When did you arrive there?

A: May 7th, 1940.

Q: What was basic training at Schofield like?

A: Well it was kind of tough really, for a young guy just away from home. It seemed like it was kind of tough but I knew the Army was going to be tough until you got used to it, so it really was not all that bad.

Q: Now after you finished basic training, what unit were you assigned to?

A: I was with the 35th Infantry Division. At that time they were... or excuse me, I was with the 35th Infantry. It was part of the Hawaiian Division at the time, and later became the 25th Infantry Division.

Q: What were your duties?

A: At first I was an ordinary line soldier, and after being in quite a while I decided there was better ways getting along, so there was a chance to go to radio school and take a test to become a radio operator. So I became a radio operator, which I remained the rest of my career in the Army, which was five years.

Q: Do you remember about when you became a radio operator?

A: Oh no, I'd have to guess, but it was probably 6 months later.

Q: What was life like as a radio operator in the 35th Infantry?

A: It was very interesting. We had our very own little radio shack where we went to school instead of doing close order drill. We did our share of close order drill, but we went to school and earned an International Morse Code and we learned how to use signal lights, and at night we could go down and practice all we wanted to. So we used to sit there and with some of the better operators at the time, listen to the news being transmitted from (I forget the name of the station) in California to the Honolulu Star Bulletin, which became the next days news. And our men could copy that; it was coming in 30-35 words a minute and we had men good enough to copy it, which later on in my career, I could copy up to 30. But at that time I was a beginner and it all sounded Greek to me.

Q: What did you normally do when you were off duty?

A: Well, after you were there a while you were issued a Class A Pass, so you could go off the Post, and we used to go down to Wahiawa which was the closest city to the Post at the time. And on pay day, we'd go to Honolulu by taxi. Otherwise we just stayed on the Post, where there was plenty of entertainment. We had a boxing bowl where we boxed. There was all kinds of sports at Schofield Barracks and we had awful good athletes too. And I tried out for a few of them myself which didn't turn out too successful.

Q: What did you do the weekend before the attack... the weekend of the attack before the attack took place?

A: Well, believe it or not, being the 7th it was the first weekend after pay day, so we had a little bit of money. So on Saturday night we were down in Honolulu and just raising heck, just like soldiers would, or sailors, or anybody, and probably drank a lot and come home early in the morning. So when we were aroused at 7:55 it was kind of early.

Q: Were you asleep when the attack began?

A: Yes I was. I was awakened by a loud explosion, which they told me later on, one of the first bombs dropped hit an ammunition dump at Wheeler Field, which was oh maybe a block away, a block or two blocks away from my barracks. And it really rattled the building pretty good, so I think that woke everybody up.

Q: What did you think it was?

A: Well, at first, I didn't, I didn't think anything of it. But being Sunday morning if you could get to the mess hall at a certain time you could eat. So I decided as long as I was awake I would go eat. So I went into the latrine and I was brushing my teeth and looking out the window when I looked up and seen an airplane come down, and I could see smoke drifting behind it but I couldn't hear nothing, and later I could hear the machine gun

fire. And the guy standing next to me looked up and says, "Boy, this looks kind of real ain't it?", and I said, "Well you goddamn fool it is real!" I said, "Let's hurry up and eat because we may not get to eat anymore today, you know?" So we got dressed and started running over to the mess hall which was 100 yards away, across what was known as the quadrangle. And we got half way across when they blew alert, and naturally, soldiers, when they blow alert get to get back and pack their field stuff and get ready to go out into the field. And I turned out to be right, we didn't eat that whole day and we didn't eat until sometime the next day.

Q: What did you do? Do you know where you went when you went out in the field? What part of the Island?

A: Well, we had a CP down in the Ewa area, and I was put on a telegraph, and well amid all the confusion nobody really knew what they were going to do. And I just sat there with the telegraph and there was no messages coming or going, so I just stayed there. And I was on duty until the next day. In fact, I probably went to sleep that night.

Q: What was the atmosphere among the men, the general feeling among the men? Was there confusion? apprehension?

A: Yes, there was a lot of confusion. Everybody was running around and not knowing what to do. But it was amazing, nobody seemed to be afraid even after they realized what was going on. Nobody seemed to be afraid, and the only thing, I don't know how they felt, but I felt like, where do we go from here?

Q: When you went down from Schofield, down to your CP, how did you get down there?

A: By truck.

Q: On that journey, could you see the damage at Wheeler and Pearl Harbor?

A: We never paid any attention. In fact I doubt if we went past Wheeler Field. We probably went out in a different direction. But when we got to the hills of Ewa, (there's hills overlooking Ewa and we had our CP [*Command Post*] there) I could look down and see all Pearl Harbor, which was all ablaze and smoking then. And by then you realized that something terrible had happened.

Q: Could you see the fires at night?

A: I don't remember. I don't remember if they burned that long or not. But the smoke was there and I don't really think we saw the fire, not at night.

Q: Did the Officers seem to be confident and in charge or did they seem confused too?

A: Well, they.... pretty much we were all in about the same

boat. Them being Officers, were a little smarter than we were, but they didn't know any more than we did. In the confusion I don't think nobody really knew exactly what to do yet... even though we were trained for it.

Q: Was there much discussion, or rumors about the possibility of a Japanese invasion?

A: Yes, there was and security was heavy that night. In fact, with some of the cattle grazing out there, a few of them got shot with people who got a little excited. And like everything else, rumors were that the Japanese were landing by paratroop, by parachute. But that didn't mature, and after when the morning came of the 7th and 8th, we realized that we were trained pretty good and if they were coming they had missed their chance.

Q: So by the time the 8th rolled around, did you and some of the others in the 35th Infantry feel pretty confident that if the Japanese did invade, that you'd be able to hold the Island?

A: Oh yes. We had maneuvers in that area for two years, and they had the artillery, and everything was zeroed in on certain sections of the beach. And our sector and every sector I'm sure it was the same, and if they had come they would have, (I can't say that they wouldn't have got ashore), they would have paid a terrific price to come ashore. And the chances are, being so far from their homeland and supplies, that I think we could have repulsed the landing, the next day for sure.

Q: How long did you remain out in the field?

A: Well, it's kind of hard to say. Uh, we stayed there quite a while and then we'd go back to Schofield for a little while, and back out in the field, and we stayed on the Island of Oahu for 11 months before we were sent on to the South, Southwest Pacific.

Q: Was there any kind of talk about possible 5th column activity having anything to do with the attack?

A: Oh when something like that, rumors run rampant. There was talk that that night all the Japanese on the Island were supposed to take up arms against us and so security was as tight as you could get it, you know? I think that under those feelings, might have had something to do with why the Japanese on the West Coast might have been put in concentration camps. I don't know why it happened, but what we did know was we couldn't trust them at that time.

Q: What incident, or event, or just scene, stands out in your memory most vividly about the Pearl Harbor attack?

A: Well, I don't know. I think the whole thing in general will never be forgotten. I can sit down and visualize the whole thing. There was... well one of them was we did get some machine guns on the roof of the barracks of the infantry and one of our

P-40's flew over, and I think we shot the tail off it. But I don't think any one thing stands out except the fact that I think I knew then that I wasn't coming home. I was due to come home in two months and I knew then I wasn't coming home in two months.

Q: I guess you figured you may as well forget it, huh?

A: That's right. That I was in for the duration.

Q: Well, thank you very much.

A: O.K.

Q: Really appreciate your coming up here and taking the time to help us with our oral history program.

A: Uh huh.